



# Australian Bureau of Statistics

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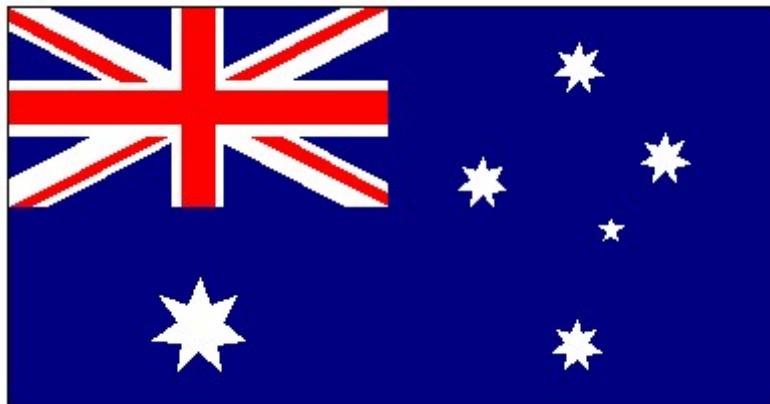
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## THE AUSTRALIAN FLAG

This article has been contributed by the former Department of the Special Minister of State.



Until Federation, the Australian colonies used the flags of Great Britain for official purposes—the Union Flag (popularly called the Union Jack) and the three Ensigns of the United Kingdom; i.e. the Red Ensign, the Blue Ensign and the White Ensign.

However, in 1900 the Colonial Office in London invited the attention of the Governor-General Designate to the necessity of a Commonwealth flag to enable the new Australian nation to comply with the provisions of legislation governing colonial naval forces and mercantile marine.

### **Competition for the National Flag**

In 1900 the Melbourne journal the **Evening Herald** held a competition with a prize of 25 Pounds for the best design for a Federal Australian Flag, and eventually a prize design was selected. This design bears no resemblance to our present National Flag, and actually was of stars and stripes on the pattern of the United States Flag.

Not to be outdone, another Melbourne journal the **Review of Reviews** in their issue of 20 November 1900 gave details of a competition for a design for a Federal Flag, offering £50 for the winning design. This journal stated that the previous competition was purely local, but that its competition would be open to the whole of Australia and overseas countries. However, in April 1901 the Commonwealth Government in a **Gazette** dated 29 April 1901 announced details of an

official competition.

The prize money for the Commonwealth Government competition was fixed at 200 Pounds for the winning design. This amount included 75 Pounds from the **Review of Reviews** journal, 50 Pounds from a tobacco company, and the balance of 75 Pounds from the Government of Australia. It was agreed that all designs previously entered in the **Evening Herald** competition would be included in the new 'national' competition which was also made world-wide and advertised in many forms in overseas countries.

The Commonwealth Government appointed seven judges, specially selected, representing the Army, Navy, Merchant Marine and Pilot Services and an expert in design, art and heraldry. A total of 32,823 designs were submitted to the judges, and the Prime Minister, the Honourable Edmund Barton, announced that the prize money for the winning designs was to be equally divided between five persons whose designs were more or less similar.

The first National Flag, made to the order of the Commonwealth Government and embodying features of the winning designs, flew above the Exhibition Building in Melbourne on 3 September 1901 when the competition results were announced.

### **Use of Australian flags**

For many years there was considerable misunderstanding in Australia and in other countries in regard to the use of the Australian flags, particularly the Australian Blue Ensign. This was due in the main to the lack of any statutory law governing the flying of national flags in Australia, although endeavours had been made from time to time to lay down some definite procedure for the use of Australian ensigns.

For some time the Australian Blue Ensign was regarded as an official flag for flying at Commonwealth establishments only. The Merchant Flag was often flown privately on land. However, on 15 March 1941 the Prime Minister, Mr Menzies, issued the following press statement:

The Official view is that there should be no unnecessary restriction placed on the flying of the Blue Ensign on shore. Its use on public buildings, by schools, and by the public generally would not only be permitted but appreciated, provided it is flown in a manner appropriate to the use of a national emblem. Australian merchant vessels will, of course, continue to fly the Commonwealth Red Ensign.

Further support for the more general use of the Australian Blue Ensign was given by the Prime Minister, Mr Chifley, on 24 February 1947 when he issued a statement encouraging the flying of the flag.

### **Adoption of the Australian National Flag**

In 1950, after an interdepartmental committee recommendation, Cabinet approved that the Australian Blue Ensign be adopted as the Australian National Flag. His Majesty King George VI gave formal approval in 1951.

In 1953 the Flags Act was passed in the Commonwealth Parliament, formally establishing the Australian National Flag and the Australian Red Ensign. Thus the nomenclature of Australian flags and ensigns was changed and the Australian Blue Ensign became the Australian National Flag and the Australian Merchant Flag became the Australian Red Ensign.

### **Her Majesty the Queen's personal flag for Australia**

On 20 September 1962 Her Majesty gave her approval for the design of a personal flag for her use in Australia. It consists of a banner of the Commonwealth Arms in the proportion thirty-one by twenty-two, with a large gold seven-pointed star over all in the centre, charged with Her Majesty's initial 'E' in gold, ensigned with the Royal Crown within a chaplet of gold roses on a blue roundel. Her Majesty's personal flag for Australia is used in the same manner as the Royal Standard in the United Kingdom and denotes Her Majesty's presence.

## **Governor-General's flag**

In Commonwealth of Australia **Gazette** No. 56 of 16 July 1936 it was notified that the Governor-General had adopted a personal flag for use in Australia. The flag, which is in the proportion of two to one has a royal blue background on which is the Royal Crest in gold (on a St Edward's Crown a lion statant guardant also crowned) with the words 'Common-wealth of Australia' in dark blue letters on a gold scroll below the Crest. The Governor-General's flag is flown continuously whenever His Excellency is in residence. It is also flown on vehicles in which the Governor-General is travelling.

## **Flags of the armed services**

It was not until 1967 that the Royal Australian Navy was given a specifically Australian ensign. Since 1910 Royal Australian Navy ships had flown the White Ensign of the Royal Navy. On 16 February 1967 the Governor-General Lord Casey signed a Proclamation proclaiming the Australian White Ensign as the ensign for the Royal Australian Navy. This was published in Commonwealth of Australia **Gazette** No. 18 of 1 March 1967.

The Australian Army uses the National Flag and has no individual flag or ensign of its own.

In 1948 the Royal Australian Air Force applied to His Majesty King George VI for an ensign, based on the Royal Air Force ensign but differenced by the addition of the Southern Cross and the Commonwealth Star in the same positions as on the Australian Blue Ensign. His Majesty's Royal Warrant for the adoption of this ensign by the RAAF was given in 1949. In 1981 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II approved an amendment to the Royal Air Force Ensign which added the stylised red kangaroo to the centre of the Air Force roundel as depicted on aircraft of the RAAF.

## **Use and flying of the National Flag**

The Australian National Flag should be displayed only in a manner befitting the national emblem: it should not be subjected to indignity or displayed in a position inferior to any other flag or ensign. The Flag normally takes precedence over all other national flags when flown in Australia. It should always be flown aloft and free. When the Australian National Flag is raised or lowered, or when it is carried past in a parade or review, all present should face the flag, men should remove their hats and all should remain silent. Those in uniform should salute.

It is improper to use the Australian National Flag in any of the following ways:

- as a covering of a statue, monument or plaque for an unveiling ceremony (a plain cover should be used);
- as a table or seat cover;
- by allowing it to fall onto or lie upon the ground; or
- as a masking for boxes, barriers or intervening space between floor and ground level on a dais or platform.

The National Flag and representations of it should always be shown, represented or used in a

dignified manner. It should not be defaced by way of printing or illustrations or masked by other objects, and all symbolic parts of the Flag should be identifiable.

On days of national commemoration the Australian National Flag may be flown on any flagstaffs on public buildings. Special days of national significance are notified as they arise.

Flags are flown at the half-mast position as a sign of mourning. The Flag is brought to the half-mast position by first raising it to the top of the mast and then immediately lowering it slowly to the half-mast position. The Flag should be raised again to the peak before being lowered for the day. The position of the Flag when flying at half-mast will depend on the size of the Flag and the length of the flagstaff. It is essential that it be lowered at least to a position recognisably 'half mast' so as to avoid the appearance of a flag which has accidentally fallen away from the top of the mast owing to a loose flag rope. A satisfactory position for half-masting would normally be when the top of the Flag is one-third of the distance down from the top of the mast.

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